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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S HYDROCARBONS: TOTAL JOINS THE RUSH

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) Olivier Bouygues, Vice President of French construction firm Bouygues, Senior Bouygues Vice President Aldo Karbonaro, and Yves-Louis Darricarrere, the president for exploration and production of the French hydrocarbons company, Total, met with President Berdimuhamedov July 30.

¶3. (U) According to press reports, Bouygues introduced Total as a "long-standing partner" with whom it could successfully work as a team in Turkmenistan. Although the two French companies reportedly did not propose any specific projects, they said Total "would be content with any form of cooperation with Turkmenistan." Berdimuhamedov noted that Turkmenistan is always open for mutually advantageous cooperation with old and new potential partners.

¶4. (SBU) Embassy Ashgabat local staff watching the state television news presentation of the meeting said that Darricarrere seemed uncertain of his role in the meeting -- almost as if it were Bouygues, rather than Total, who was romancing Berdimuhamedov and who might have been seeking to reestablish the Bouygues hydrocarbons exploration branch that it closed several years ago.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: As one of the long-standing most-favored construction companies in Turkmenistan, Bouygues would seem to have a natural leg up in the rush for the supposed new Klondike. But there are other players. Shell is visiting,

and some expect a major announcement. At the same time BP has been here all week. ConocoPhillips comes next week. A/DCM and Charge met with the BP team twice and will report those meetings separately. END COMMENT.  
HOAGLAND